

## PLAY TIME 20



*Hugh Willis belaying Tony Dick at the start of Play Time. Photo C Edelstein*



# The (near) Perfect Trad route?

Rock Climbing is probably one of the most esoteric activities in the world with everyone having a personal “take” on it. The very nature of climbing is that it is as infinitely nuanced as the rock is on which it takes place. Climbing lore abounds with lies, tall tales and interpersonal strife especially at the “cutting edge” of the sport (if indeed it can be called that) not least of which are the almost annual debacles that occur on Mt Everest. We all, I suppose, want to be acknowledged and to leave a legacy –preferably an honest and favourable one unlike Maestri who bolted Cerro Torre. And we all have our way of going about it.

Climbing traditionally had no defined rules, only a loose set of ethics that vary from time to time and place to place. In the past, everyone had their personal preference, favourite place and particular style and we created and modified the rules to suit ourselves. The rapid and dramatic commoditisation of climbing in the last 30 years or so has made it accessible to millions of people who frequent not only the rock faces but the indoor climbing gyms with over 5 million members in the USA alone. Sponsors and the media now dictate the rules and the climbing “athlete” has emerged. These climbers spend a huge amount of time kow-towing to their puppet masters and climbing with a camera lens pointed at them.

The commercialism of climbing has all but killed the adventure. Everest has become every person’s mountain with children, grannies and “disabled people” doing annual ascents.

Fixed gear is mostly the norm on rock routes that are contrived through the most unlikely blank sections of rock with bolts, not features, defining the line.

Recently the [Jeopardy wall on Table Mountain](#) seems to have captured the imagination of every climber that is capable of climbing those grades and [Klein Winterhoek Amphitheatre’s](#) virtues have been extensively extolled on our web pages. Both climbing venues can be considered home to some of the iconic trad routes but it is an extreme irony to me that both areas rarely get on-sight free ascents. “Oceans of Fear” has never been on-sighted and its trad status is questionable in that many of the hardest moves are protected by bolts. The routes on the Jeopardy Crag are (almost) invariably head pointed and all 3 of the cruxes on the original Jeopardy are protected by fixed gear.

One thing though, that has endured over the last 100 years in the broader trad climbing community is the concept of the “**classic**” climb. Most of these classic climbs are not particularly hard and nowhere near “**perfect**” but by and large see far more ascents than the harder routes. You will not read much about them in the media. One only has to think of Nutcracker in Yosemite, A Dream of White Horses in the UK, Arrow Final on Table Mountain, Exposure in F Major and Northwest Frontal in Du Toits. These routes have stood the test of time and the climbers who fashioned the first ascents have left a fine legacy for others to admire and try to emulate. These are climbs for the ordinary man, not the career climber or the outlier sponsored athlete.

I have been trad climbing for 38 years or so and I have been searching for the (near) perfect trad climb for about 35 of those years and I think I may have found it.

But First: What is the perfect trad climb. Of course, this is open to debate and this article hopefully will be stimulating in that regard.

Here is my take:

1. **It must be broadly appealing and easy:** I have done first ascents of several routes that I used to consider to be my best at Blouberg and Yellowwood and elsewhere and they all fail as

they are too remote, too hard or too scary or all three for most ordinary people to do – and that means me too because I dumbed some of them down with fixed gear and by and large “head-pointed” them. Not one of these routes have had an independent ascent during their existence that ranges from 3 to 17 years. The perfect grade for the perfect route should not be more than say US 5.7 or 5.8, British HVS or E1 5a, French 5a or b. And SA and AUS 17/18.

2. **It must be an aesthetic line:** The route should ideally follow a stand out feature in the area where it is situated like a crack system, dihedral or arête. Cape Sandstone does not lend itself to continuous lines so this is a tricky one in the local context but “Smallblaar Ridge” is the winner locally!. On TM “Africa Arête” is spectacular to look at and Africa Edge is very cool to climb. “Satisfaction Guaranteed” and “Big Corner” at Tafelberg are obvious lines.

3. **It must be continuously steep on good rock and “safe”.** Classic routes such as “Arrow final”, “Exposure in F”, “Northwest Frontal” and “Eight Miles High” have a history of serious accidents as they all lack in this department. There must be no hanging stances.

4. **It must have no pin scars, manufactured grips or fixed gear of any kind whatsoever.** One of the all-time “classics” in Yosemite is “Serenity Crack”. This, like many “free” routes in Yosemite, the Dolomites and elsewhere around the world exist entirely as the result of pin scars. It is unlikely if any of the major big wall routes on El Cap would ever be climbed free without what amounts to chipped holds and bolts.

5. **It must be multi-pitch and long.** Few classic good routes are more than a pitch or two.

6. **It must be of consistent grade and quality.** Very few classic routes are. I can’t think of one that is that is more than a 100m or so long that is consistently good – top to bottom.

7. **It must be accessible but still require a decent effort to get to and do.** You must get home and feel worked and tired at the end of it.

8. **It must invoke a sense of awe (or “wow”) and be a little intimidating before, during and after.**

9. **It must be high above the surrounding terrain and have a vista.**

10. **It must have a bold, wild, airy exposed feel about it** even if it is not actually remote.

11. **It must be adventurous.** It must be achievable but success must not necessarily be guaranteed on the first attempt if the grade of the route is at or near your limit. So it must not be for sissies who fear failure.

12. **The climbing must be varied, funky and interesting – moves must require some thought to work out.**

13. **It must be all seasons** especially in South Africa.

14. **Escape off the route must be relatively uncomplicated** although it can have an “epic” aura about it.

15. **It must be on clean rock that does not require frequent ascents to keep it “climbed into condition”.** There are many classic routes in the UK that would be complete choss but for the fact that frequent ascents keep the cracks and gear placements free of mud and vegetation.

16. **There must be a pub at the end of it to prolong the “feel-good” with your climbing partner(s).**



Readers are invited to critique or add to this list which is certainly not complete.



***Deon on the second pitch.!*** Photo C Edelstein



**Deon Van Zyl on the 3<sup>rd</sup> pitch. Photo C Edelstein**

Recently, Deon Van Zyl and I fashioned what I consider to be the closest to a “perfect” trad route I have personally ever climbed. In terms of the “perfect line” it cannot compete with Smallblaar’s knife edge line or “Africa Arête” but it is right up there with the best in all other criteria listed.

There is no move that is really harder than grade 18. (I think of the move off the ground and the crux on Atlantic Crag on TM and there is nothing quite as hard as that). **BUT** it has more moves of grade 16 or 17 than on any route I have ever climbed. It just goes on and on and on for around 160m (400ft) of climbing. It is more consistent than its neighbour route **Divine Time 19**, it is well protected, has safe comfortable stances but feels totally “out there!”



It requires no special gear; a standard rack with a full set of cams to 3” and nuts to size 10, 6 quick draws and 6-9 slings is all that is required. It is in the shade most of the morning and experienced climbers will be done in less than half a day. The descent is down the user friendly abseil route a horizontal rope length walk to the right and I have done the abseil 5 times now without misadventure – once in high wind.

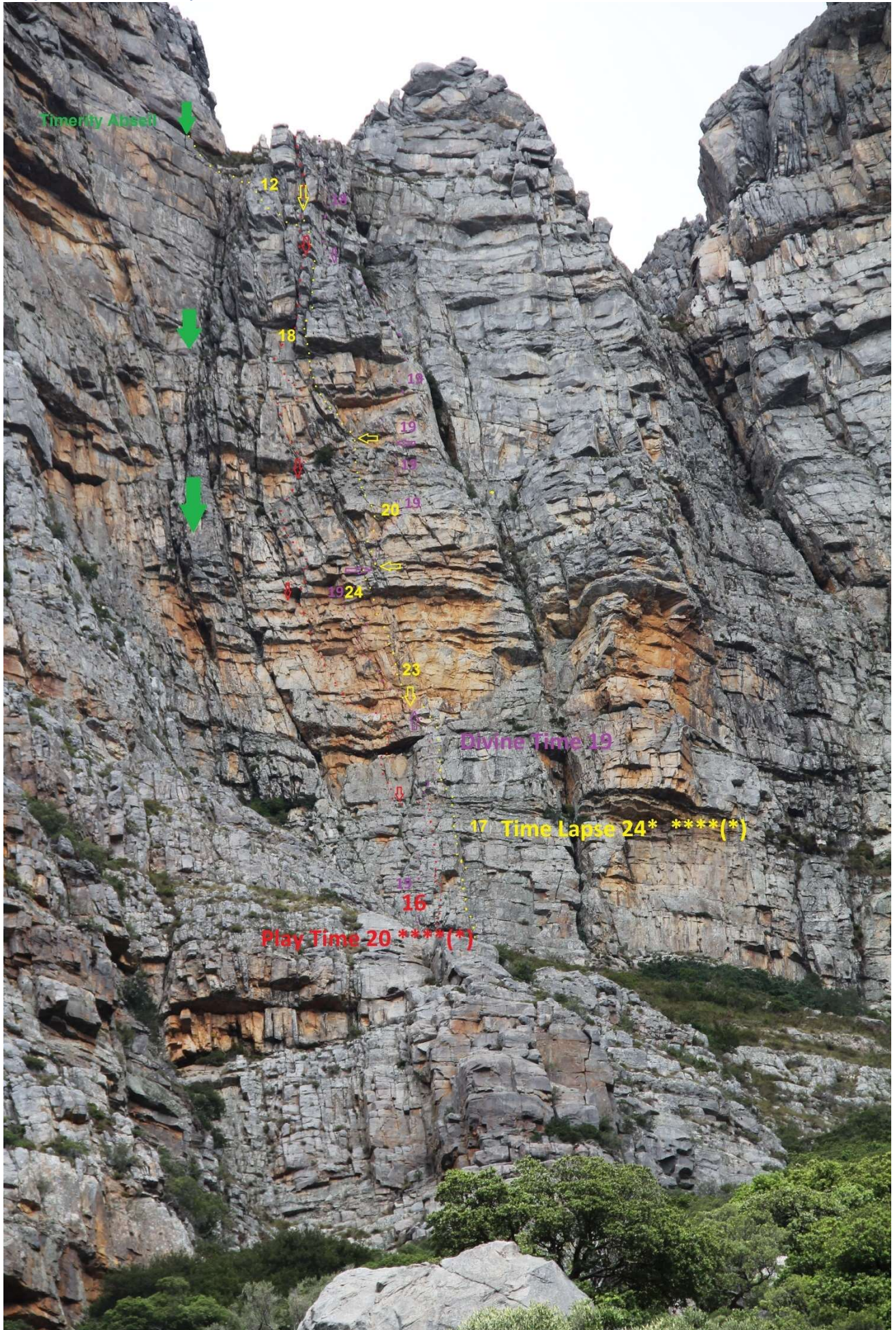
The pub is an hour walk and 5 minute drive from the base – so even condition 16 is ticked.

I have many friends who are passionate about climbing including Margaret my wife and our average age is now well over 50. Most climbers in the world and especially people my age feel very tested on routes like “Magnetic Wall”, “Atlantic Crag” and even “Jacobs”. “Play Time” is a very do-able “big” “bold” route that I would recommend to anyone that has some experience of trad climbing. I am content to climb and share this route with all my friends. What could be more “perfect” than that!

Time will tell whether the trad climbing community will put its stamp of approval on this route and if it will deserve being regarded as “iconic” or “classic” by future generations.

It is called, “Play Time!” It is at Yellowwood!







## PLAY TIME 160m 20

**Pitch 1:** 16 50m. Start 4m right of Divine Time. Climb up onto the block and do a high step through the undercut onto the face. Continue to below the overhang and step onto the arête. Continue straight up to the ledge and walk left past the base of the grey pillar to a stance.

**Pitch 2:** 18 35m. Avoid the vegetated corner on the right and climb the grey clean crack to the dassie ledge. If you can reach the holds place a good nut and 1.5 in cam and crank up to jugs and continue to a narrow ledge. (Avoid the crank by moving to the grey pillar on the right and then back left – not very aesthetic.) Walk left along the ledge a few metres. (Remember to leave a directional piece for your second.) Climb the polished white and orange rock tending up left to stance in the cubbyhole.

**Pitch 3:** 20 30m Climb out right of the cubbyhole to a recess. Move up right out of the recess. Climb up diagonally left past an excellent finger lock to a below a large jammed flake. Lay back past the flake as is this the easiest way to do this – just trust your feet. Continue up tending a little right to stance right below the roof on the right.

**Pitch 4:** 19 45m Climb straight up for about 3m and then up the flakes for another 3m. Traverse right 4m under the thin overhang to a ledge. Place some gear on the right and then negotiate a move back left to find good jugs. (Do not climb the crack on the right – loose rock.) Continue up the face staying 3m left of the dihedral on the right and then move right to the arête when 3m or so below the large overhang. Continue up the chimney crack to stance level with the large yellowwood bush seen on the right on Divine Time.

**Pitch 5:** 30m 16. Climb inside the chimney or outside on the flakes and continue straight up to the top.

Beta: This route is climbable after rain but it is harder but still safe. You will find lots of wet holds that make the footholds seem very insecure.

The gear is really good where you need it to be.

On the third pitch, once you are in the recess do not exit it on its left. It really is not that tricky going right and much cleaner and easier. The climbing is really excellent. Going left lands you in hard scary choss.

## DIVINE TIME 160m 19 \*\*\*\*\*

**Start:** View the topo on the photograph. The route starts just right of the “Snotter Camp” and takes the first gap through the overlap. The start is marked by a cairn on a whitish coloured block.

**Pitch 1:** 55m (19). Climb up on to the white rock and place a high large cam. Crank through to a jug using a rounded pinch. Continue straight up the good quality but easy grey rock to a ledge at 35m or so. Start up the obvious recess and step right onto the face/pillar and continue tending slightly left to a ledge with some blocks at the base of the orange rock.

**Pitch 2:** 35m (19). Head for the left-leaning recessed red ramp and continue to below the large overhang. Climb through the overhang on the right. One can place excellent gear at the lip from an under-cling in the corner under the overhang. Make sure you have very long slings to avoid drag if you choose to leave gear in the rail under the overhang. Swing out right and climb up right to a small stance 3m above.



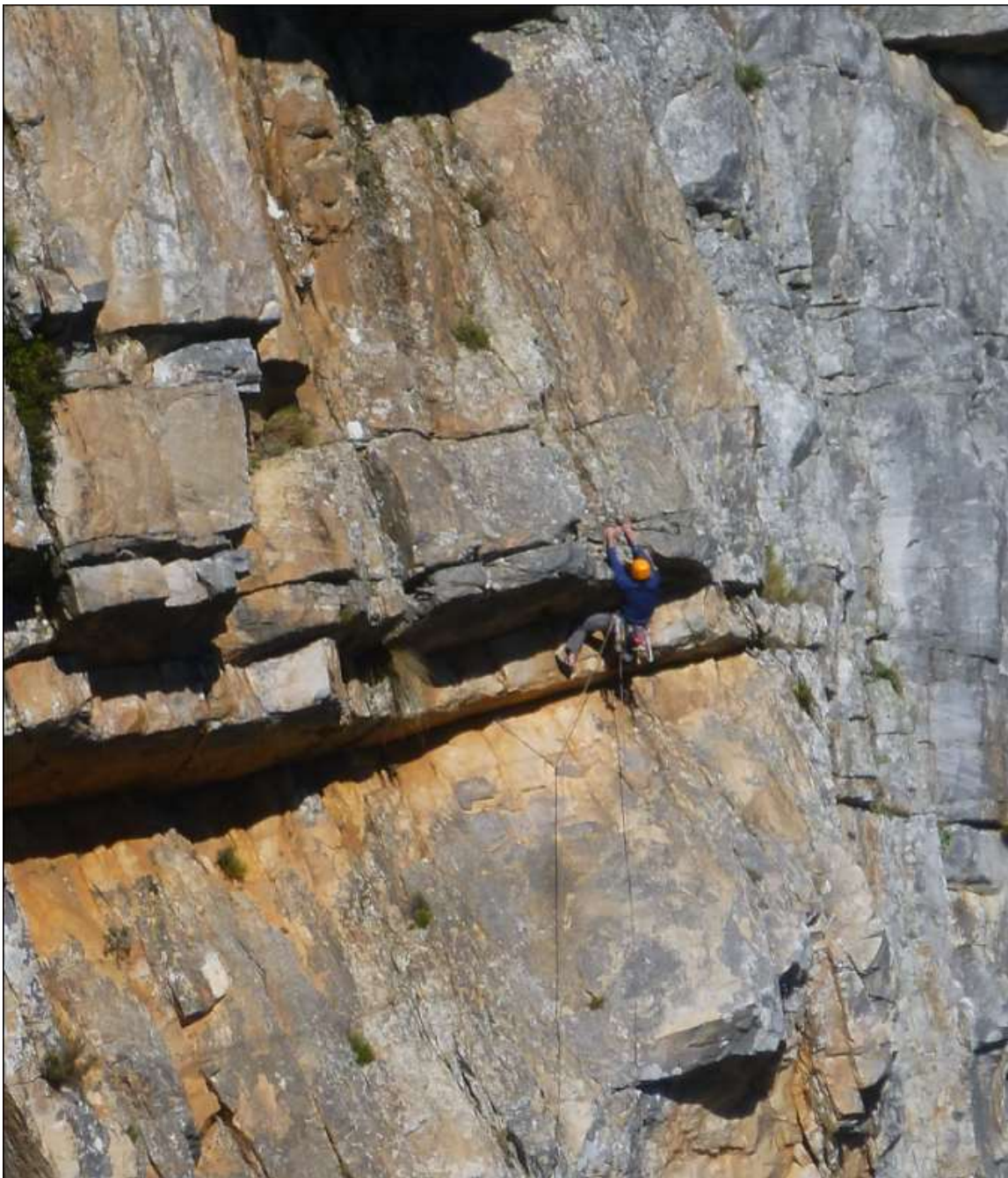
**Pitch 3:** 25m (19). Follow the good rock diagonally right passing the first triangular overhang on black stained rock but good jugs. Continue up past the second, larger triangular overhang on the right and then straight up as per the photo topo to a ledge. Crank straight up and then lay-back strenuously up the grey flakes above to a large ledge.

**Pitch 4:** 50m(19). Place a 1 inch cam high up on the right. Climb up the left lay back flakes to easier ground. Above you are huge roofs. Move up to under the roof and then pull through the obvious notch about 3m to the right to find yourself under another massive roof system. Exit this easily on the right and then climb straight up the arete to belay left of a large yellow wood tree/bush.

**Pitch 5:** 25m (18). Climb the obvious recess using the flakes for about 12m and then do a crank through the overlap to continue more easily to the top.

*FA: C Edelstein, Deon Van Zyl February 2014*

**DESCENT.** The *Timerity abseil* is about 30m to the left and easily visible.



**Brent Russel at the 2<sup>nd</sup> curx on the 4<sup>th</sup> Pitch of “Divine Time” 19.** Photo C Edelstein.



**TIME LAPSE 24 \*\*\*\*\***





So, when in a momentary lapse of reason you think all the decent new route possibilities have been explored, developed and refined on the East Buttresses, and especially the **Divine Time Buttress**, along comes a **“Time Lapse”**. The first pitch is again a quality 55m pitch on the grey rock that supports the overhanging yellow orange panel above. The second pitch has two cruxes of 23 and 24+ that yet needs to be led free with a tricky in-between section that is a little run-out. As at June 2017 this pitch had not been led on-sight free. The third pitch also has good climbing and the fourth is an airy and intimidating but easy crank through a gap in the massive “eye-brow” overhang to the left of Outrageous time. Easy climbing allows you to finish at the Timerity Abseil Bolts.

Credit must go to Adam Roff for pointing out the split in the overhang to the right of the **Divine Time** crux of the second pitch. I had considered this as an option previously but knew it would be really hard. And it is.

**Pitch 1:** 55m 17 Start a few metres right of the start of Play Time and head straight up to the right facing corner 20m above. Climb this halfway to where it gets grotty and swing left on to the arete. Continue up to the large blocky ledge system but move up and left to stance at the base of the yellow panel on a standing stance below the overhanging recess of the second pitch. (Your leader will appreciate you stancing there rather than lower down on the right).

**Pitch 2:** 30m 23 A0 (24) Place high gear off strenuous crimps and pinches and move up into the recess above. It then gets a little run-out but continue to the overhang. Climb the jamb crack with difficulty and stance on the right. (FFA still needed.)

**Pitch 3:** 25m 20 Climb straight up and crank through the overhang above to easier ground. Continue to the large ledge below the overhang. Be careful to avoid a large loose block that cannot be trundled as there is all the Snotter Camp below.

**Pitch 4:** 40m 18. Do an awkward move and attain the lichen covered ramp up on the left. Climb this on the left arete where the rock is clean and find your way up to the left side of the massive “Eyebrow” or ‘Cats Ears” overhang. Climb the slot on the left that is easier than it looks and the climb the right arete to a ledge quite high up.

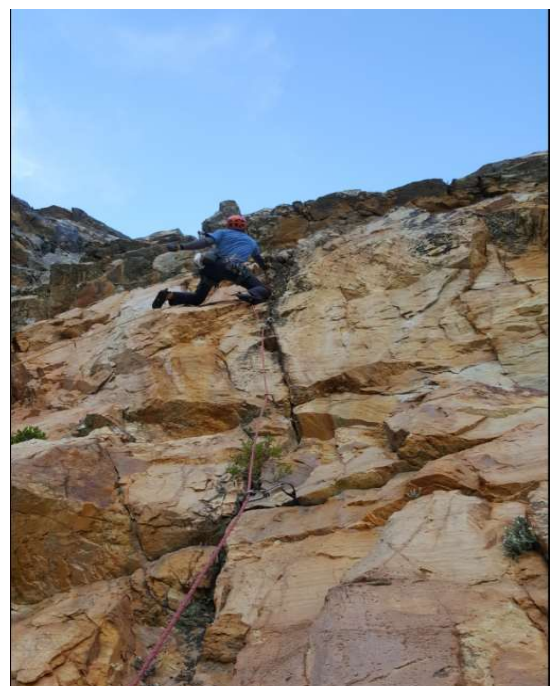
**Pitch 5:** 50m 12. Wander up and left to the gully and traverse line and belay off the Timerity Bolts or further back in the shade.

*FA C Edelstein and Brent Russel Nov 2016*



**Willem Le Roux 1<sup>st</sup> Pitch of Time Lapse**

**Willem on 1<sup>st</sup> 23 crux on 2<sup>nd</sup> pitch**







***Brent Russel following the final pitch on “Time Lapse”. Photo: C Edelstein Nov 2016***



## OUTRAGEOUS TIME (25) \*\*\*\*\*

A fun route that offers steep climbing and a proper crux. Starts about 25m right of the tea spot, just right of a small tree. A small cairn against the base marks the spot.

**Pitch 1** (21) 45m. Climb straight up, turning a little roof on the left at 20m. Continue straight keeping to clean rock to below a blank face at 35m. Make a move up the right facing corner and then step left onto a small arête. Continueto a comfortable ledge. Stance here.

**Pitch 2** (24/25) 25m. From the stance, climb diagonally left to the base of a steep orange recess. Strenuous moves past two fixed wires take you to easier terrain. Follow the crack for about five meters. A rising traverse to the right gains the face below a break in the roof. Climb up to the break, then crank through the roof. Step right to stance on the small ledge just over the lip.

**Pitch 3** (19) 30m. Head straight up to a large ledge 30m above. Pull through the steepest part of the midway bulge on excellent holds (in common with Divine Time).

**Pitch 4** (21) 40m. Climb the left-tending crack to easy ground. Continue straight up, turning the roof via the grotty, vegetated break (or do a long reach move on cleaner rock left of the break). Head 2m left to the start of a bottomless corner. Layback up the corner to a big roof (beware: loose rock). Power right along the rail and through the roof. 20m of easy ground puts you on a big ledge below a white, lichen-covered wall.

**Pitch 5** (22) 25m. Climb up the centre of the white, lichen-covered face to a ledge below a flaring, overhanging crack. Follow the crack to the top of the buttress.

Note: The crack is a little awkward to climb and hard to protect lower down.

**Descent:** Walk 50m left to the abseil line down Timerity. Three quick raps puts you back on the floor.

**Gear:** The route is protected with a standard rack (wires, Camalots, Aliens, a dozen slings and draws, 2 x 50m ropes)

*FA: Charles Edelstein, Richard Halsey, Adam Roff (pitches 1-4); Charles Edelstein and Willem le Roux (pitch 5) – November 2015*

*FFA: Willem le Roux and Douw Steyn – January 2016*



## TIME AFTER TIME 22\*\*\*\*\*

"Time after Time" gets its name from me being repeatedly surprised as to how the **East Buttresses** keeps on yielding excellent routes on good quality rock when one would have thought that all was said and done in the area. Despite this, a whole host of new routes have followed on from this.

Like all new routes it required a few ascents to refine it. On the first attempt with Robert Breyer in April 2014, the first pitch wandered around a bit as I thought the off-width at 15m would be desperate. The first attempt at the second pitch involved crossing over the gully on to the **Tea Time Buttress** but this was chossy, unprotected and dangerous to say the least.

I retreated from this and headed out left on to the gorgeous yellow and red face that is now home to some of the best climbing at Yellowwood including the second pitches of **Play Time, Divine Time, Time Lapse, Outrageous Time** and now **Time after Time**.

A circuitous path to the left and then back right makes for some very aesthetic climbing.

The third pitch is mind-boggling as it climbs with absolute ease, very steep and intimidating rock on big jugs and excellent gear.

The original fourth pitch was hard, complex and scary and was abandoned to be improved by crossing the gulley on to the **Tea Time Buttress**. Here it climbs a steep technical crack system and continues up the left arete of the buttress to finish up a tricky dihedral.

This route is as good and varied as any at Yellowwood.

**Pitch 1:** (55M) 19 Climb directly to the off-width and continue straight-up tending a bit left. At around 25m crank up into a short recess and then continue up the ramp to finish up a short left facing corner and stance on the good ledge.

**Pitch 2:** (35m) 20 Walk left past a bush and from the left side of the ledge climb carefully up to the right facing corner capped by the large roof. Do a tricky move left and then easily traverse left below the thin overhang to where it pinches. Pull through and then move back right just above the lip of the overhang across the red-yellow face. A good 2inch cam protects the crux and then climb diagonally to stance on a block directly over the original stance just left of the gully.

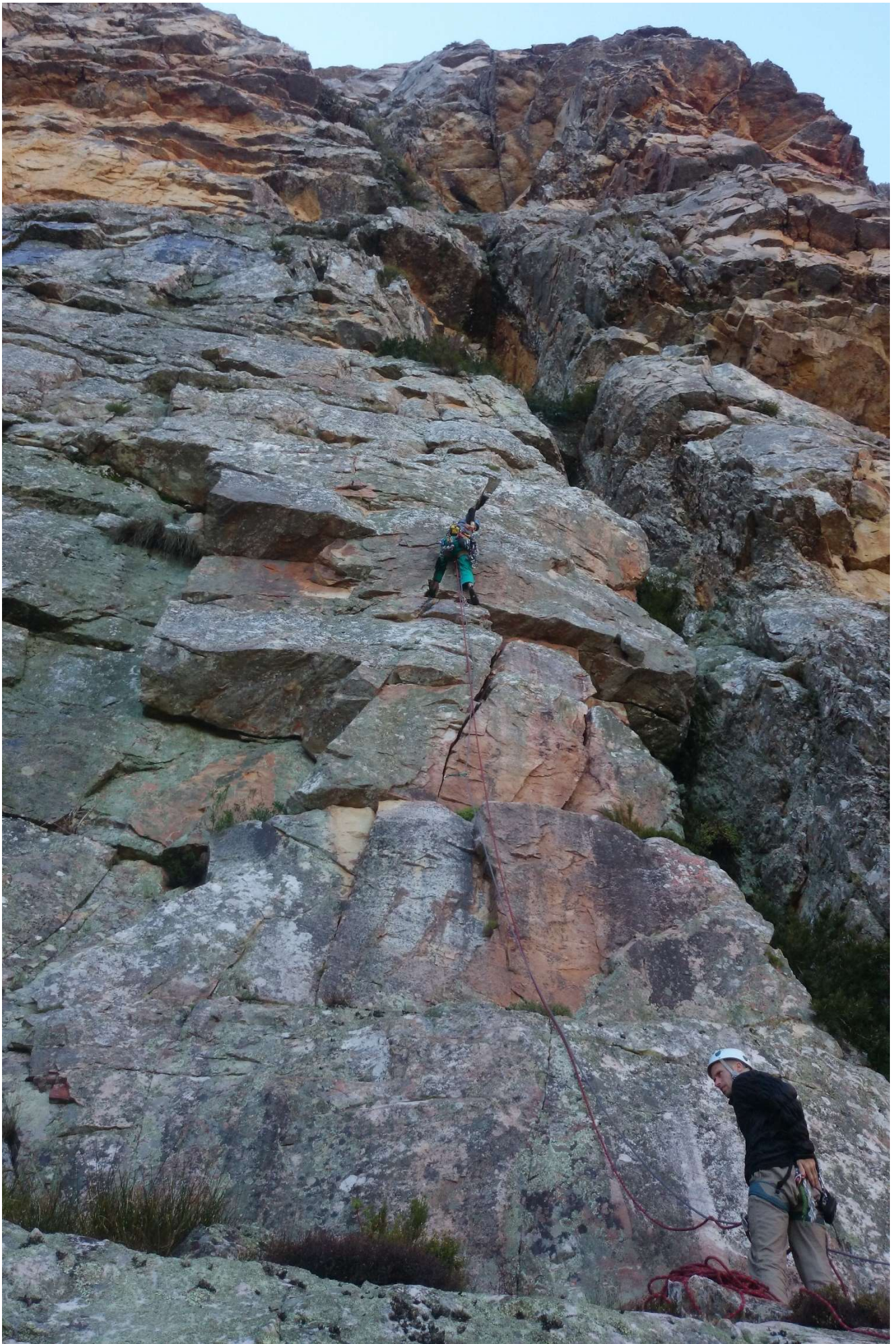
**Pitch 3:** (35) 16+ This is an extra-ordinary pitch. Move up under the overhang and traverse easily left to where it ends. The crank wildly on jugs and move out left on to a grey and white face. Continue jug hauling to where the angle eases. Cross the gulley to Tea Time Buttress and stance.

**Pitch 4:** (40m) 21. Climb the shattered appearing crack system just left of the chossy crack to a good ledge.

**Pitch 5:** (30m) 21+. Pull up on to the arete and continue till you can move left above the large roof system. Do tricky stemming moves to gain a left facing corner. Continue to the top.

First Ascent: Charles Edelstein and Robert Breyer. 16 April 2014





***Richard Halsey belayed by Douw Steyn on Time after Time first pitch 2014. Photo C Edelstein***





***Robert Breyer on following the second pitch of Time after Time on the first ascent. Photo C Edelstein***





**Richard Halsey and Douw Steyn on Time after Time 3rd pitch 2014. Photo C Edelstein**



## GOOD TIME 160m 21 \*\*\*\*\*

**Start:** The **Tea Time Buttress** is a 10 minute walk down to the left (east) of the main Yellowwood Amphitheatre and a minute or two from the drip or **Snotter Camp**. Start on a block just to the right of the gulley separating the **Divine Time** from the **Tea Time Buttresses** and left of a small tree.

**Pitch 1:** 30m 19. Climb up the front of the pillar with care. The climbing is probably only grade 18 but it is a bit run out. After 15m the ledge step right onto the arête. Continue on good rock to a stance next to a large block on the right and a yellowwood bush on the left.

**Pitch 2:** 20m 17. Crank directly up the rail and swing left above the yellowwood. (Hard grade 21 boulder move if you are short. Alternatively walk left over the yellowwood and crank up on to the arête on the left). Then head right for the arête and climb the cracks to a comfy ledge just left of a red corner.

**Pitch 3:** 20m 20 Do not continue up the corner but use the rail (hollow sounding) to swing right around onto the red face. Climb up 3m or so to an overlap and move right about 3 metres on a ledge system. Move up and then diagonal back left on gorgeous rock and then trend back right to the large overhang to stance just below the rail in semi-hanging stance.

**Pitch 4:** 10m 21+. If you get this right it is easy and really only grade 20. Place bomber gear in the rail out left and then rail through to get good excellent flakes on the lip. If you end up lying on your back with a foot out to the right on the overhang it is really only about 20. Stance just over the roof on a ledge so that you communicate with the second.

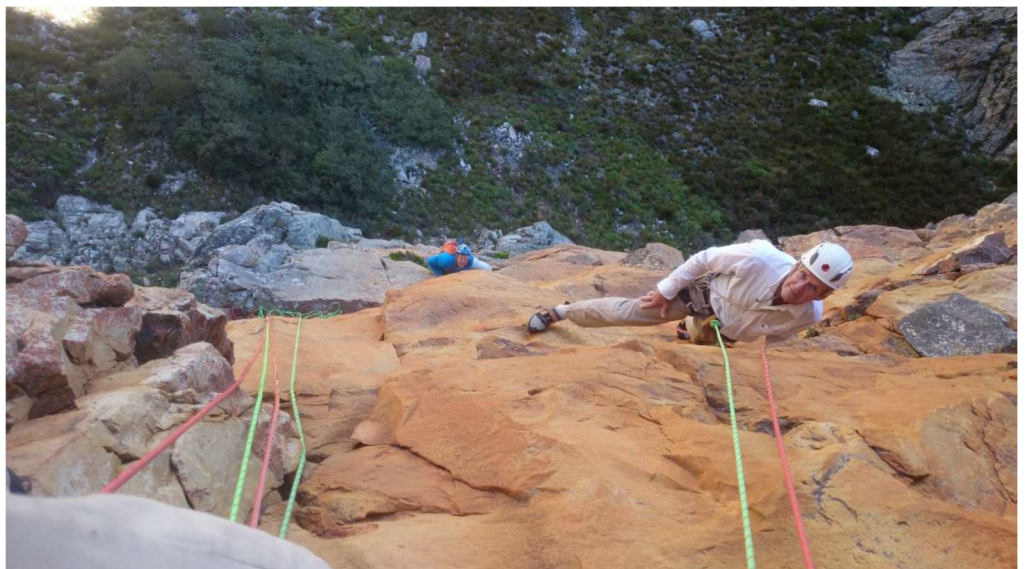
**Pitch 5:** 25m. 15 Climb up on juggy rock and then tend left to a large ledge. Hide behind a block in the shade if you are already in the sun.

**Pitch 6:** 55m 19. This is one of best grade 19 pitches anywhere. It is varied, safe and funky. Scramble up to the recess left of the obvious off-width crack on the right. Put out a small cam to the left of the crack but then do a slippery stemming move to left of the cam to the rail. Climb up and then step left into the recess. Climb this and continue up right past the large roof. Climb the flake and then continue up the right facing corner and follow the obvious line to a stance at 55m.

**Pitch 7:** 15m 19. Continue directly up – one tricky move – to the large ledge where you can belay in the shade.

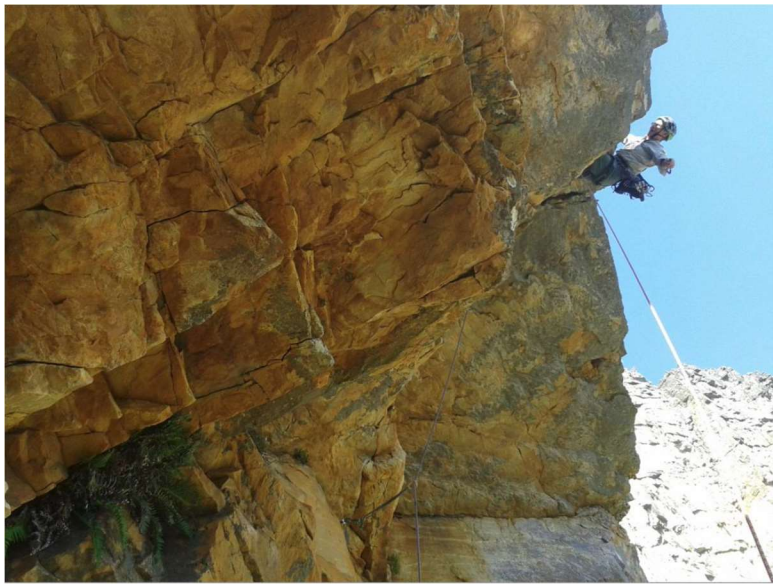
**Descent:** Walk 70m or so carefully around left and horizontally along the ledge above the Tea Time Buttress, then over the Divine Time Buttress to the **Timidity Abseil Point**

First Ascent: C  
Edelstein and Deon  
Van Zyl April 2014



**Tony Dick and Bruce Daniel on Pitch 3 of Good Time: Photo C Edelstein**





***Snort hanging out on the crux of Good Time: Photo R Halsey***

***Douw Steyn on the crux rail. Photo CEdelstein***



***Richard Halsey starting and finishing the crux of "Good Time" 21: Photo C Edelstein***





***Richard Halsey high up in the classic 19 pitch of “Good Time”: Photo C Edelstein***





***Snort following the classic 19 pitch of “Good Time”: Photo R Halsey***





***Adam Roff raving on “Good Time”: Photo Roger Natrass.***



## TEA TIME 160m 24 \*\*

The route ascends the first more or less free-standing buttress to the left of the main amphitheatre about 10 minutes down from the centre. It is a minute or two right of the [Snotter Camp](#). It serves up typical Yellowwood climbing with tricky gear placements and the odd bold move. The crux is an extremely thin rail that will be much harder for taller climbers. But it can be easily aided too.

**Pitch 1:** 30m 21. Start at a stone cairn and climb deviously up the break to a large ledge.

**Pitch 2:** 20m 19 A0 or 24. Move left and climb up to the overhang on red and golden rock to the thin rail. There is a fixed nut in place to the right. **Good Time** goes out left. Move across the thin rail to jugs and continue up easy rock to stance. (Freeing the rail is up for grabs!)

**Pitch 3,4 and 5:** 110m 17. Climb to the top in 3 or 4 pitches on delightful climbing following the obvious crack line.

Descent: as for **Good Time** use the [Timerity Abseil Route](#). Walk carefully horizontally east (left) about 100m along the ledge system over the **Tea Time Buttress**, then over the **Divine Time Buttress** to the first bolted **Timerity Abseil Point**.

First ascent C Edelstein, Jonathan Hajos and Ilya Koll September 2011